

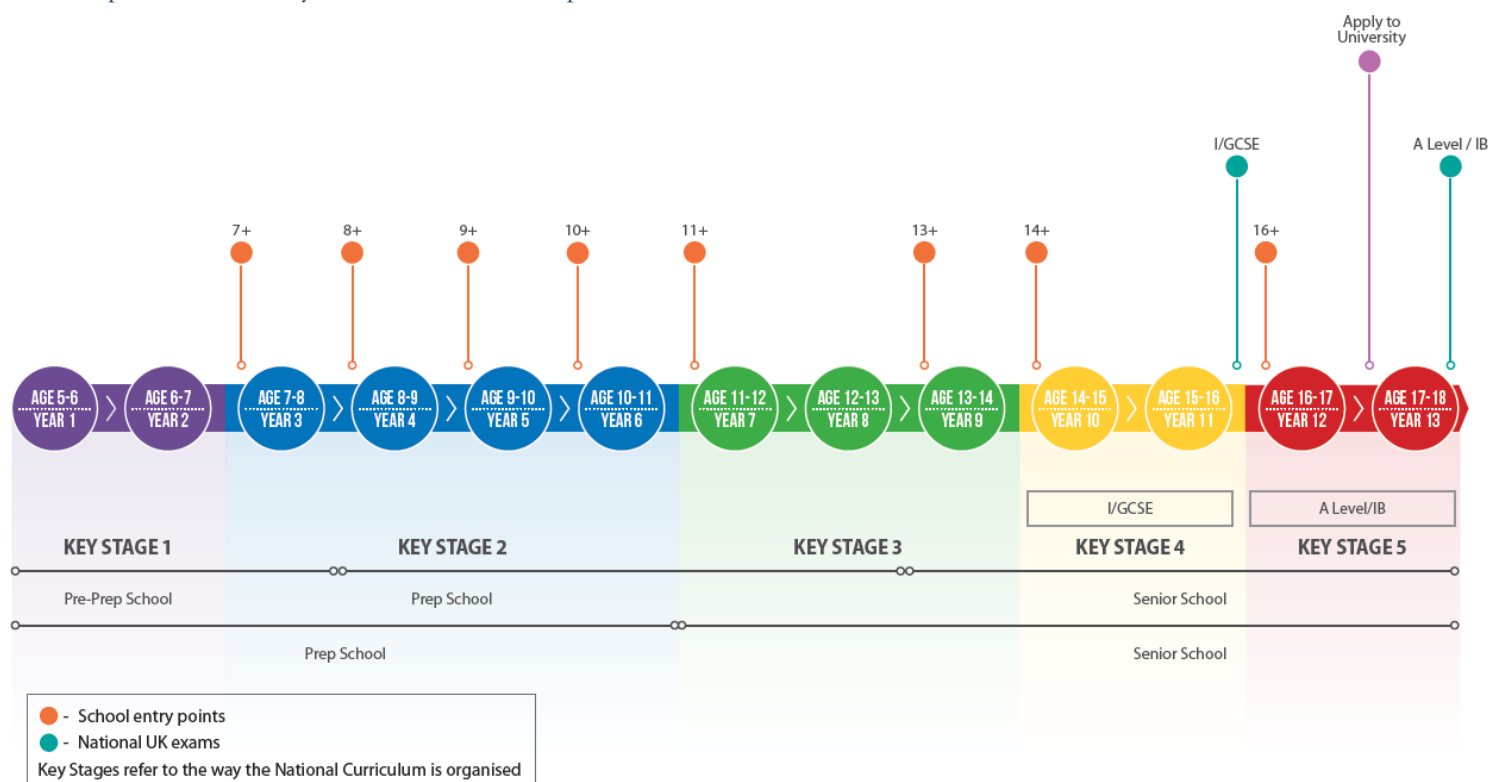


KEYSTONE TUTORS

TUTORING & EDUCATION ADVISORY

Overview of UK Independent Education System

In the UK there are two types of school; state funded which account for 93% of students and then independent (also known as private/public) schools which account for the remaining 7%. This guide gives an overview of the independent school system for international parents.



Schools by age

Pre-prep schools: Children will usually start at the age of 3 or 4 and the aim is to prepare them for a move to prep school at age 7 or 8 (Year 3 or 4). Pre-prep schools are often linked to prep schools and many children will transition from one to the other.

Prep schools: Entry is usually at age 7 or 8 (Year 3 or 4), where children will take the appropriate 7+ or 8+ exams but it is possible to start at 9 or 10 if there are places available. Prep schools prepare children to gain entry to senior schools, usually at the age of 11 or 13.

Senior schools: Senior schools can start at age 11 or 13 and go through to age 18. Common entry points to senior school are usually at 11+ (Year 7), 13+ (Year 9) or 16+ (Year 12) and most schools will have an established admissions process for these. Most senior schools are selective and prospective students may have to sit computerised and/or paper tests, interviews, assessment days before being offered a place. Depending on student movement, some schools may have occasional spaces for entry at 12+ (Year 8) and 14+ (Year 10). Years 12 and 13 are collectively known as the Sixth Form.

Sixth Form colleges: These cater to students aged 16 to 18. They provide AS and A-level courses, as well as other more vocational courses such as BTECs. The environment is more informal (no uniform) and students are expected to be fairly independent and take responsibility for their own education.

Schools by boarding type

Day schools: Students live with their parents and commute to school each day.

Weekly boarding: Students will live at school Monday to Friday and spend weekends with their parents.

Flexi-boarding: Parents can choose how many nights a student will spend at school or at home.

Full boarding: Students live at school all the time apart from exact weekends (designated weekends in each term where students can leave) and school holidays. This is the most common choice for international families as it allows the parents to live outside the UK.

Main entry points for international applicants

Some prep schools offer boarding, therefore international students can start at a UK school before senior school. However most students will enter at the following points:

- **11+:** Your child will start Year 7 at their new school.
- **13+:** Your child will start Year 9 at their new school.
- **16+:** Your child will start Year 12 at their new school.

National Qualifications

GCSE: Qualifications taken by students at the age of 16; Years 10 and 11 are usually dedicated to GCSE preparation, although some schools may start in Year 9. Students usually take around 10 GCSE subjects. English, Maths and Science are compulsory, and students choose from a list of optional subjects which include humanities, languages, creative arts and technology-based subjects. The optional subjects available will depend on the school provision – not all schools offer all subjects. GCSE grades are awarded on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest) and the results will be used to assess whether students can study certain subjects at Sixth Form, for university applications and some jobs will have minimum GCSE requirements.

International GCSE: Introduced to enable students from overseas to receive the IGCSE qualification but can also be taken in UK independent schools. There is not a significant difference between the two qualifications and they are viewed in the same way by universities. IGCSEs can be graded in two ways; A*-G or 1-9.

A Levels: Qualifications taken by students at the age of 18; Years 12 and 13 (Sixth Form) are dedicated to the preparation. Students will generally take 3 or 4 A Levels and they can choose whichever subjects they wish to, assuming their school offers the subject. Each subject is studied in great depth and some subjects are essential for university courses (e.g. Maths and Physics to study Engineering) so consideration needs to be given to one's aptitude for the subject and the university courses they are interested in before Year 12. A Levels are graded A*-E.

AS Levels: One-year qualifications usually taken in Year 12 if a student doesn't want to continue with the subject for 2 years. AS and A Levels can be taken alongside each other – for example, a student might take 3 A Levels and 1 AS Level.

Note – exam boards: For GCSEs and A Levels there are several exam boards (AQA, CIE, Edexcel, and OCR) that offer the qualifications. Exam boards provide the specification and write the exam papers. Schools will choose which exam board they use for each subject so students do not have a choice. The relevance for students is when they are independently studying and revising – they need to focus on the specification for the right exam board. If you have a tutor make sure you tell them the exam board as soon as possible.

Pre-U: An alternative to the A-Level, the Pre-U is a two-year course with examinations at the end that can be taken alongside A Levels. Pre-U subjects are graded as Distinction (D1, 2, 3), Merit (M1, 2, 3) or Pass (P1, 2, 3).

Note – Pre-U last examinations in June 2023: since the A-Levels were reformed, the Pre-U is no longer seen as a distinct alternative and therefore the decision has been made to withdraw them.

IB: The IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) is a two-year qualification taken in Years 12 and 13 (Sixth Form) that requires students to take 6 academic subjects across various subject areas. Students will take 3 subjects at Higher Level and 3 at Standard Level. In addition, they take a course called Theory of Knowledge (ToK), participate in an independent research project to produce an Extended Essay (EE), and engage in extracurricular activities related to Creativity, Action and Service (CAS). Each academic subject is graded from 1 to 7 and 3 further points are gained from the components – the highest possible IBDP score is 45.